

For general release

REPORT TO:	OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10 th February 2020
SUBJECT:	Fairfield Halls
LEAD OFFICER:	Paula Murray – Director of Culture
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

This report provides an update on Fairfield Halls - it outlines how the venue and its inclusive and high quality programme contributes to the Corporate Plan 2018 - 2022 aim of valuing the arts, culture, sports and activities.

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	Fairfield Halls is reviewed on an annual basis by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The Committee is asked to consider the information provided and decide if it wishes to make any recommendations.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Fairfield Halls reopened in September 2019 following a period of redevelopment and renewal. Operated by BH Live on a concession basis with no council subsidy, the new programme will re-establish Fairfield Halls as a venue with an inclusive and diverse programme and as a premier destination for visitors and promoters.
- 1.2 Fairfield Halls returns with two new resident theatre companies Talawa and Savvy who are creating and producing content. It also provides a home for long standing residents the London Mozart Players, for familiar content including the annual pantomime and touring productions, as well as original and innovative pieces.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on programming and content, customer experience and the refurbishment of the Halls.

FAIRFIELD HALLS

2. Fairfield Halls – Concession Contract

- 2.1 In April 2017 the Council confirmed that it would enter into a Concessions Contract with BH Live to operate Fairfield Halls following its refurbishment.
- 2.2 BH Live was selected to run all aspects of the newly refurbished Fairfield Halls, delivering an integrated offer across a number of specialisms:
- 2.3 The venue
 - A cultural destination of choice for residents and visitors
 - An open and welcoming building that is animated and busy
 - A building with a mix of attractive environments for everyone; for children and families, for young adults, for older visitors
- 2.4 The programme
 - Wide ranging year round programme at different scales for audiences in the Borough
 - A high quality strand of programming across all forms of music, theatre and dance of national significance
 - Available spaces for Croydon schools, communities and organisations to use for milestone cultural events in their annual programmes

2.5 Supporting functions

- High quality conference facilities
- Restaurant, bars and catering

- 2.6 The operator agreement and lease is managed by officers in line with the Council's contract management model, with quarterly strategic reviews and monthly performance and planning meetings. An annual performance appraisal will be undertaken to inform the business planning cycle for both the council and BH Live. The operator agreement includes open book accounting provision, a clear service performance regime and a requirement to deliver a balanced programme as detailed in their tender submission.

3. Content and Programming

- 3.1 It is the ambition of the council and BH Live that Fairfield Halls will be home to a wide ranging cultural programme and will host quality conferences and exhibitions and we are working collaboratively to develop the content and programme for the venue. The intention is that it will be diverse and inclusive, attract national and international productions and visitors, bring in new audiences, and create new exciting content.
- 3.2 Launch events took place from 16 September 2019, when the public were welcomed in to experience the new venue, this was followed by a star-studded ceremony in the evening. Special guests included Dame Judi Dench, who reopened the Ashcroft

Playhouse in honour of her friend and Croydon-born actress the late Dame Peggy Ashcroft, and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, who formally opened the building. The re-opening received much local and national press coverage with the new spaces and plans receiving plaudits from The Stage and the Telegraph amongst others.

- 3.3 Dance Umbrella's Weekend Takeover in October 2019 showcased a mix of international dance, pop-up events, performance-parkour, homegrown talent, and take-part workshops. The takeover had something for everyone with a range of ages, abilities and tastes catered for dance workshops, parties, a dance jam, DIY choreography and featured hip hop, Asian inspired and outdoor performances.
- 3.4 The 2019 Pantomime Cinderella received good reviews and returned solid ticket sales. Tickets sold well in Croydon as might be expected, and numbers were also high in neighbouring boroughs including Bromley, Sutton and Kingston. The new production created especially for the Fairfield Halls starred Ore Oduba, Tim Vine and Cat Sandion and made good use of the new technology available following refurbishment.
- 3.5 London Mozart Players (LMP) brought cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason to the Halls in January – Sheku was Young Musician of the Year in 2016 and played at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. LMP continue to bring classical music to Fairfield Halls and by using new young talent are bridging the gap between traditional classical music lovers and new audiences.
- 3.6 The longer term programme is developing and will strengthen as the venue gains reputation with promoters and companies and BH Live is committed to working with the council to develop the programme. Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ) and Music City funding has been used to bring in events and productions that raise national profile and international reputation, bring in new audiences and promote our live music scene. This has enabled a range of activity including a performance by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, two performances of Silk Road choreographed by Jose Agudo in collaboration with classical Indian dancer Mavin Khoo, free rehearsal space and reduced venue hire for London Mozart Players, and large festival-feel events such as Croydon Rocks.
- 3.7 The Fairfield Production Fund has been established via the CEZ to support new productions produced in Fairfield Halls so it does not simply become a receiving house. One investment of £10,000 has been made so far for a new production of Carmen by Jose Agudo Dance Company; this investment has pulled in over £65,000 from the Arts Council and other funders. This original production is to be premiered in September 2020.
- 3.8 Local community organisations have free or low cost use of the Community Cube which has so far been used by SliDE Dance an integrated dance company, Parabolic theatre delivering a large scale community project with young people with a disability, Croydonites festival of new theatre and Beeja Dance's community production of Mahadev.
- 3.9 A year-round programme of free entertainment in the foyer, funded by commercial activities in the venue such as the new business lounge, ensures Fairfield Halls is accessible, open and inspiring to all.
- 3.10 The venue continues to develop approaches to inclusivity for disabled people, not only

is the theatre now more accessible to people using wheelchairs; offering greater choice of seats, including in boxes, but it has also recently won praise from Justin Thomlinson MP for its autism friendly relaxed performances. Relaxed performances are those with less artificial lighting and background noise – more quiet spaces are also provided.

3.11 Fairfield Halls is also the home of three theatre companies:

- Savvy Theatre Company are a company in residence, delivering weekly classes and performances from Fairfield Halls; it has been creating unique and accessible theatre experiences in Croydon and the surrounding area for more than ten years. Savvy creates ambitious, inclusive productions and theatre experiences that bring different groups of people together, engage with local communities, and enables people to be involved regardless of their ability or disability, advantage or disadvantage.
- Talawa is the UK's primary black led touring theatre company and has taken up residence in a 200-seat studio and offices at Fairfield Halls. This will be the first time since 1995 that their headquarters will feature an on-site performance space. Fairfield Halls is providing a home for black theatre artists, enabling them to make outstanding work which will truly diversify and shape the cultural life of the whole country. The new residency will also create opportunities to train young black artists in technical and creative theatre disciplines, suited to Croydon's status as the London borough with the largest youth population, and working in partnership with organisations in the borough and nationally.
- Zoo Co is an award-winning theatre company that creates powerful, playful productions that have been performed to audiences across the UK and around the world. They have recently taken up office space as part of their Arts Council England development grant.

3.12 It is important to note that Fairfield Halls is not just a performance space, not long after opening the Halls hosted two large scale business focused events - Business Expo Live south London's largest business-to-business event and Croydon's 2019 Economic Summit – both events will be returning to Fairfield Halls in 2020.

4. Customer Experience

4.1 Trip Advisor gives Fairfield Halls a 3.5 star rating, there are 67 Positive/Very Good/Average comments since opening, 28 Poor and 32 Terrible reviews (14 of the Poor /Terrible relate to pre-September 2019).

4.2 The poor and terrible reviews comprise relate to a number of issues which can be grouped as:

- Lack of car parking – the car park will reopen in spring 2020;
- Staff training requirements –staff training is reviewed regularly and tailored according to customer feedback;
- Lack of signage – improved signage has been installed addressing comments received;

- Issues relating to performances outside of venue control;
 - Seat conditions in the Ashcroft – this has now been addressed with the refurbishment of seats complete;
 - General comments about refurbishment quality and snagging issues.
- 4.3 Google rates Fairfield Halls at 4.1 stars. In the last four weeks there have been 80+ 4 and 5 star reviews and of the 1, 2 and 3 star reviews 60% are due to snagging issues, seating and parking.
- 4.4 There is very little feedback relating to challenges using the website or booking tickets using other routes. There have been just under half a million visits to the website since it was launched and 63% of sales come via this channel. BH Live will develop the website and provide training to front of house staff in line with customer feedback.
- 4.5 The TripAdvisor and Google reviews point to fact that customers are enjoying the productions and content at Fairfield Halls but that there are still some snagging issues to be resolved and some systems changes required to ensure a top class experience.
- 4.6 Visitor numbers since opening to the end of December are 88,000 ticket sales - 26% occupancy (against a business plan target of 45%) and 23,000 conference / events delegates.
- 4.7 The council and BH Live acknowledge that the first 6 months will be a bedding in period for the reopened Fairfield Halls and that facilities and systems will be subject to teething troubles. There is a real commitment to continue to develop and refine ways of working, deliver staff training and deal with snagging issues to ensure that visitors have a high quality experience while booking and during their visit.

5. Public Realm

- 5.1 A temporary public realm scheme including wayfinding signage between Fairfield Halls and East Croydon Station has been completed – this has opened up previously cluttered space for pedestrians and created a clear two-way cycle lane.
- 5.2 The council has commissioned a world class design team, led by MICA Architects, for the permanent Fair Field public realm and landscaping proposals to provide a public space Croydon can be proud of, and that is an integral part of the renewal of the Croydon Opportunity Area and delivery of Croydon's Cultural Quarter, anchored by the new Fairfield Halls. The commission is underway with the first round of public engagement scheduled for early 2020.

6. Fairfield Halls – Refurbishment

- 6.1 The refurbishment brief, agreed between Brick By Brick and the council, was to take a heritage-led approach with wholesale improvements to the appearance, operation and commercial viability of the halls. This included:
- Improved food and beverage and commercial offer
 - New rehearsal and performance venues

- Sensitively restored spaces
- Improved flexibility in use
- Increased capacity
- Improved environmental control and energy use
- New mechanical and electrical services including, new lighting, air conditioning, fire alarm & detection
- New suspended ceilings to all front of house and acoustically sensitive areas
- New energy centre serving halls and future homes development
- New studio and café facing College Green
- New back of house facilities
- Much improved accessibility

6.2 The summary scope of works can be found at Appendix 1

6.3 The changes to Fairfield Halls involved an extensive programme of works and some snagging issues have yet to be resolved, this is not unexpected in such a large, complex scheme. The seating replacement in the Ashcroft Theatre will be complete by the end of January 2020 and the car park reopened in spring 2020.

6.4 The extensive refurbishment and transformation of Fairfield Halls was funded by the development value from the surrounding land, where Brick By Brick is bringing forward a major mixed-use scheme that will create 421 new homes as well flexible office, retail and leisure space. The wider Fairfield project received a £11.48m contribution from the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), as well as a contribution from the Mayor of London's CEZ scheme.

6.5 The current estimated cost of the Halls refurbishment works is £42.6m, with final accounts pending. The root and branch refurbishment of the Halls has provided a new civic and cultural centre for the people of Croydon, improving accessibility, performance and efficiency, and ensuring a lasting legacy building for future generations.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary Scope of Works

CONTACT OFFICER: Emma Lindsell, Place Department, 07776992031

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

Appendix 1 – Summary Scope of Works

The summary scope of work agreed between the council and Brick by Brick includes

External

- *North*– Cleaned and renovated façades to improve durability, appearance and environmental performance. Failed precast cladding to Arnhem and Concert Hall elevations completely replaced to improve thermal performance and integrity while retaining original appearance and acoustic benefits.
- *Cloister*– New build addition with glazed frontage to college green, café and community studio, improved car park access, new signage.
- *West*– existing cladding and glazing cleaned and refurbished, restored elegance, transparency and grandeur to entrance, new lighting, better visibility to foyer, new signage, new forecourt paving and drainage.
- *South*– failed precast cladding to Concert Hall replaced, refurbishment to existing facades, re-build Arnhem venue from ground up with additional roof terrace and multi-purpose venue at Level 02, backlit glazing to high level extension creates a glowing beacon signalling the transformed spaces within. New Barclay Rd landscaping works.
- *East*– Improved get-in and service yard, refurbishment to cladding and glazing.
- New roof coverings to all flat roof areas.
- New gutters and downpipes to Concert Hall roof.
- New mansafe systems, access routes and guarding to provide safe maintenance access to roof areas.
- New lightning protection throughout.

Internal

Front of House & Foyer

- Restoring grandeur and function of 1962 foyer.
- New frameless glass entrance doors and glazed screens.
- Reinstate original features, columns, new bespoke chandeliers and lighting to match originals.
- New bar and cafe facilities including hot food prep area.
- Full redecoration.
- New floor finishes.
- New services throughout, including heating, ventilation, fire detection and alarm systems.
- New and refurbished timber, brass and glazed balustrading and handrails.
- New accessible lift stops at upper foyer for both new front of house lifts.
- Flexibility for performance and other uses.
- New sun lounge bar for reception and drinks.
- New public Changing Places facility to provide accessible changing area for central Croydon.
- New toilets throughout including improved accessible toilet provisions.
- New signage and wayfinding.
- New loose furniture and indoor planting.
- Additional small power.

- New accessible entrance from car park.

Concert Hall

- Sensitive restoration and alterations to improve flexibility and operation.
- New acoustic banners to improve performance for amplified music.
- New mechanical ventilation system providing heating and cooling to current standards.
- New house lighting and fully refurbished, restored and re-lamped existing chandeliers.
- Careful preservation of celebrated acoustic for classical and orchestral music.
- Improved canopy operation and flying capacity.
- New performance lighting, AV and stage equipment infrastructure.
- New floor finishes throughout auditorium.
- Refurbishment of concert hall platform flooring.
- Refurbishment and additional safety measures provide to stage lifts.
- Selective replacement and refurbishment of all seats.
- Provision of wheelchair accessible viewing boxes.
- Complete redecoration throughout.
- Timber refurbishment throughout.
- New external tiled floor finish to terrace.

Ashcroft

- Capacity increased from 750 to 803 seats.
- Improved environmental conditions throughout.
- Improved back of house facilities.
- Existing seating restored, additional capacity added, seating & lobby layout alterations
- New floor finishes to existing repaired screed floor to auditorium.
- New ceiling to auditorium following removal due to extensive presence of asbestos.
- New plasterboard linings to walls due to asbestos and redecoration to auditorium.
- New heating, ventilation, lighting, AV & performance lighting systems.
- New flytower roof and smoke ventilation system.
- New fire safety curtain and drencher systems.
- New fire detection and fire alarm system.

Arnhem

- Rebuilt to double area and provide a naturally lit, multi-use space for rehearsals and performances.
- New stone rainscreen cladding to re-create original appearance and massing with improved thermal performance.
- New UV panels to help achieve Breeam ‘Excellent’ rating.
- Back-lit glazed cladding to extended upper levels creates a glowing beacon, signalling the transformation of the halls.
- A new level of studio and roof terrace.

- Upgraded bars and other function rooms.
- Improved commercial viability for hire and community use.
- New semi sprung timber flooring to both venues.
- New heating cooling and ventilation services with flexible performance & lighting grids.
- New plant enclosure, new plant deck and PV panels, new roof coverings and cappings.
- Achieve Breeam ‘Excellent’ rating for new works.

Cloister

- New build building with structural and triple glazed curtain wall façade
- Large glazed pivot door and external terrace to west elevation
- Automatic glazed entrance doors.
- Glazed internal doors
- Tiled and semi-sprung timber flooring.
- Underfloor heating to all areas.
- New lift and naturally lit staircase to provide improved access to basement and car park.

Back of House

- New kitchens and service lift.
- Improved get-in, service yard and loading dock areas.
- New mechanical and electrical services.
- New sprinklers to basement, lower ground and Ashcroft Theatre.
- New accessible artist’s entrance and platform lifts.
- New accessible dressing rooms.
- New WCs, showers, dressing and changing facilities.

Energy Centre

- New services, boilers, pumps, combined heat and power plant, to serve Halls and surrounding development
- New gatic access hatch, fire rated roller shutter, fire rated doors, mezzanine and transformer room enclosure